

# Protecting the Nation



The U.S. Coast Guard protects people on the sea, protects the U.S. against threats delivered by sea and protects the sea itself. We are responsible for the safety, security and stewardship of our nation's waters. With a unique blend of legal authorities and multi-mission capabilities, the Coast Guard provides maritime governance for the

U.S. on the high seas and throughout our 4.3 million square mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). As the fifth armed service, the Coast Guard provides certain unique capabilities as a fully integrated member of the Joint Force. We are America's maritime first responder.

Proficient and disciplined Coast Guardsmen with modern, highly capable cutters, boats, aircraft and C4ISR systems, backed by superior mission support, are all vital to performing our broad spectrum of missions. In 2014, we will continue to address high-risk threats, while focusing on recapitalization efforts, with special emphasis on proficiency of the force.

Coast Guard forces comprise an integrated network from shoreside to coastal waters to far at sea that provides critical capabilities required to ensure our nation's maritime governance. We help ensure economic prosperity by protecting maritime transportation that carries most of U.S. trade with the world. We prevent and respond to both persistent threats and sudden disasters and crises. We focus on executing national priorities through DHS' layered security strategy and the key objective to interdict threats as far from U.S. shores as possible.

Coast Guard cutters and aircraft provide a persistent at-sea presence and threat interdiction in the Western Hemisphere Transit Zones in the eastern Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea, keeping narcotics from flowing across the U.S. southwest land border to U.S. streets. These cutter interdictions hit smugglers where they are most vulnerable—far at sea—and damage Transnational Organized Crime networks that foster violence and corruption and threaten regional stability in Central and South America. They combat maritime human trafficking from multiple vectors that risk lives at sea and threaten the orderly U.S. immigration system. Our cutters and aircraft protect U.S. natural resources and migratory fish stocks from illegal harvesting, preserving these resources for the future in areas off New England, in the Great Lakes, to the Gulf Coast,

from the Arctic and the Bering Seas to the deep Pacific.

Our recapitalization program includes eight 418-foot National Security Cutters (NSCs) to replace our 40-year-old fleet of 12 378-foot High Endurance Cutters. NSCs are designed to conduct the Coast Guard's most challenging missions on the high seas and within the U.S. EEZ by enabling a persistent presence to detect, interdict and defeat maritime threats to the U.S. Our three in-service NSCs (*Bertholf*, *Waesche* and *Stratton*) realized several notable achievements in 2013, and we recently christened the fourth NSC, *Hamilton*. Two other NSCs are in production. The contract for the first installment of long lead materials for the seventh was recently awarded, and funding for production is contained in the President's Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 budget.

Recapitalization efforts of our offshore cutter fleet continue with the evaluation of proposals for the Offshore Patrol Cutter (OPC), which were received from industry in 2013. Three preliminary and contract design contracts are planned to be awarded this spring. The program of record calls for 25 OPCs to replace our aging fleet of 28 Medium Endurance Cutters, some of which will reach 50 years of service this year.

To date, the Coast Guard has taken delivery of eight of the 58 planned Fast Response Cutters and has 16 more under contract. In addition, 144 of our new Response Boat-Medium have been delivered, with the final boat of the expected fleet of 170 to be delivered by late this year. There are now 16 new fixed-wing HC-144A maritime patrol aircraft in service, with two additional airframes being delivered, and we will be receiving 14 excess C-27J airframes from the Air Force. The C-130J fleet will expand in the coming years, as three more airframes are on contract: two being delivered in FY16 and the third in FY17. Additionally, the entire fleet of MH-65 and MH-60 helicopters have received substantial technical upgrades.

Finally, the Coast Guard recently completed the reactivation of the heavy polar icebreaker *Polar Star*, which is currently deployed to Antarctica for Operation Deep Freeze 2014 in support of the National Science Foundation. This heavy icebreaking capability, along with *Healy*, ensures the U.S. has assured access to the ice-bound polar regions to meet U.S. national security requirements there.

Continued recapitalization efforts are essential to the Coast Guard's ability to provide maritime governance for the nation and to protect U.S. economic prosperity by safeguarding the maritime transportation system that is central to our trade and commerce. ♪

*Admiral Robert Papp, USCG, is the Commandant of the United States Coast Guard and was the guest speaker at a 2013 Navy Now Forum.*